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SUBJECT: ELECTION SNAPSHOT: IN FIRST WEEK OF SECOND-ROUND
CAMPAIGN -- ROYAL WOOING THE CENTRIST VOTE AS SARKOZY KEEPS
HIS LEAD IN LATEST POLLS

REF: A. (A) PARIS 1611 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. (B) EMBASSY PARIS DAILY SIPRNET REPORT FOR APRIL
27

[1](#)C. 2007

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: With a little more than a week to go, center-right Presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy continues to hold a distinct lead over center-left candidate Segolene Royal in all polls of second-round voter intentions, with 53 percent for Sarkozy and 47 percent for Royal. Sarkozy and Royal spent the first week of the second-round's two-week campaign wooing the 18 percent of voters who supported centrist candidate Francois Bayrou, well half of whom Royal needs to win to her side if she is to have any realistic chance of winning. In his campaign appearances Sarkozy has underlined his inclusive vision of France; he spoke of France as a generous and vibrant "synthesis," and of his determination to unite the French. The week has seen a steady defection of centrist parliamentarians to Sarkozy's camp. Royal, for her part, openly pursued Bayrou and his voters, underlining the affinity between the social consciousness and institutional renewal in her program and Bayrou voters' convictions. Bayrou held a press conference in which he refused to endorse either Sarkozy or Royal but was in fact much more anti-Sarkozy than anti-Royal, and announced the launch of a new, centrist, Democratic party aimed at carrying on his "new center" democratic reform agenda. So far, Royal's moves to the center have not significantly changed her poll numbers, and Sarkozy remains the odds-on favorite to win the presidency May 6. Barring a dramatic move by Bayrou to join forces with Royal or a catastrophic Sarkozy misstep, Royal's hopes may well hinge on her May 2 debate with Sarkozy on national television. End Summary.

FIRST-ROUND AFTERMATH

[1](#)2. (U) On April 22 (refs) first-round winner Union for a

Popular Movement (UMP) president and former interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy received almost 11.5 million votes, 31 percent of the total. The second-place finisher, who will face off against Sarkozy in the second-round May 6, was Poitou-Charentes Region President Segolene Royal who received 9.5 million votes, 25.9 percent of the total. The third-place finisher, centrist, Union for French Democracy (UDF) leader Francois Bayrou received 6.8 million votes, 18.6 percent of the total. Simplifying somewhat, minor candidates of the right (including Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the extreme-right National Front (FN)) took 13.25 percent of the vote; minor candidates of the left took 11.5 percent of the vote. Adding the great bulk of these far-right and far-left votes to the projected second-round results of, respectively, Sarkozy and Royal, makes clear that Royal has to garner the votes of well over half of those who voted for Bayrou to win on May 6. The morning of April 23 she launched her effort to pull a critical mass of these centrist swing voters into her corner, while trying to avoid alienating her far-left supporters who currently support her as the alternative to Sarkozy.

ROYAL THE "SOCIAL DEMOCRAT"

13. (U) In remarks to the press April 23, Royal "held out her hand," as she put it, to discussing "points of convergence" with Bayrou. She placed two conditions on this proposed debate -- that its point of departure be her electoral platform (to cover her flanks among her Socialist supporters) and that it be a "public, transparent debate that happens before everybody's eyes." In her campaign rallies and television appearances Royal pursued her determined signaling to Bayrou's supporters. For example, in a prime time television appearances on April 25 and 26, a relaxed and voluble Royal pointedly evoked the advisability of "getting out of bloc against bloc" confrontation, clearly echoing Bayrou's most resonant campaign issue that partisan, left/right gridlock is part of the immobilism that hamstring

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France. In addition, Royal made clear that she could incorporate centrist inspired "new ideas" into her "Presidential Pact," as she calls her electoral platform. She often used the phrase "social democracy," and used the word "socialist" only when referring by name to her party. Royal also stated that she could very well include UDF ministers in her administration's cabinet.

14. (SBU) Royal and Bayrou agreed to hold a public "debate" to review points of convergence between their electoral platforms, but France's equal time watchdog -- or self-imposed restrictions by the media interpreting electoral law for themselves -- could well prevent them from actually following through on their agreement. It remains to be seen what effect, if any, Royal's unabashed wooing of Bayrou's centrist supporters will have on her final vote totals May 6. Royal is walking the line of trying to attract centrist voters without alienating her left flank; Bayrou for his part is interested in preserving the viability of his own centrist movement for the future.

SARKOZY THE "UNITER"

15. (SBU) For his part, and exhibiting all the tightly controlled scripting for which his campaign is justly famous -- and all the barely controlled activism for which he is justly famous -- Nicolas Sarkozy shot out of the starting blocks of the second-round campaign in his first-round victory statement the night of April 22. "My mission now is to unite the French people," he said. From different angles, Sarkozy has returned to this theme again and again in his campaign and TV appearances in past days. At a large campaign rally in Rouen on April 24, for example, Sarkozy delivered a paean to France, its past history and current diversity, ending by proposing "that we all take on together...the challenge of globalization." In TV

appearances April 25 and 26, Sarkozy, while not neglecting to review and defend the range of his reform proposals for France, also, and quite emotionally, evoked his serious preparation for the responsibilities he was seeking, and his commitment to "uniting the French."

¶6. (U) In dealing with the threat posed by a Bayrou-Royal union, Sarkozy has urged French voters to focus on the contest between the winners of the first round of votes, while quietly working to win over Bayrou deputies, if not Bayrou himself, to his side with the promise of creating a centrist "pole" within the center-right party.

BAYROU BETS ON VIABILITY OF "NEW CENTER"

¶7. (U) At a press conference attended by 400 journalists on April 25, Bayrou refused to endorse either Sarkozy or Royal. Bayrou also announced the creation a new Democratic party, aimed at riding his "neither left nor right" political vision to success in the upcoming legislative elections (June 10 and 17). Without sparing Royal -- he focused on her economic policies' lack of realism -- Bayrou nonetheless personally attacked Sarkozy. Bayrou said Sarkozy was prone to "using methods of intimidation," and that this way of exercising power was "a risk for democracy and our social fabric." According to a close Bayrou advisor, Sarkozy and Bayrou "have not spoken since 2004," and are "diametrically opposed characters" who view each other with deep mistrust. While refraining from explicitly endorsing Royal, Bayrou made quite clear that he would not be voting for Sarkozy.

¶8. (SBU) So far, Royal's gesturing of her affinity to centrist voters and Bayrou's perceived "tilt" against Sarkozy has not been reflected in any polls of how Bayrou supporters plan to vote on May 6. According to a major polling firm's sounding of Bayrou voters right after the first round, 54 percent planned to vote for Sarkozy and 46 percent planned to vote for Royal. As of April 27, about one-third of Bayrou's supporters are reportedly moving toward Sarkozy and one third toward Royal, with one third still undecided.

SARKOZY MAINTAINS CLEAR LEAD

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¶9. (U) The latest polls of second-round voter intentions, across the board, all show Sarkozy with a decided lead over Royal. For example, three major polls (IFOP, BVA and IPSOS), all taken this week after the first-round, all show Sarkozy with 53 percent of voter intentions and Royal with 47 percent. Only one poll, taken by the SOFRES polling organization on April 23 and 24, reflects a somewhat tighter race; this poll shows Sarkozy with 51 percent of first-round voter intentions and Royal with 49 percent. The most significant polls will be those taken after the May 2 televised debate between Sarkozy and Royal.

¶10. (U) Pollsters across France this week are hard pressed to suppress their gloating over the way their poll projections, in the week before the first round, were vindicated by the first-round's actual results. If current projections hold -- and barring a decision by Bayrou to join forces with Royal, a serious misstep by Sarkozy, or a clear victory by Royal in her May 2 debate with Sarkozy -- Sarkozy would appear to be on track to win the May 6 election.

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